Slow Food® Uganda

Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity

LET'S EXPOSE LAND GRABBING!

Financed by Intesa Sanpaolo's
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The Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity and Intesa Sanpaolo are working together to develop the Slow Food network in Uganda, creating gardens and Presidia and initiating many other activities with food communities.

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LAND GRABBING IN UGANDA

Around the world, huge tracts of fertile land are being sold or rented for extremely low prices. Tens of millions of hectares have been surrendered in recent years to produce food crops for export or biofuels, to extract resources or to resell the land on the financial market, like any other commodity.
This so-called land grabbing is severely threatening the environment, food sovereignty and the very lives of local communities.

Uganda has been affected by land grabbing for more than a decade. Land grabbing is the acquisition (lease, concession, or outright purchase) by corporations or states of large areas of land on a long-term basis (often 30 to 99 years). Compared to other countries like Ethiopia and Tanzania, land grabbing in Uganda is less evident (no massive land evictions or fights with armed groups) and it is taking different forms.

1. Agribusiness is the main purpose, whereby big pieces of land are grabbed to develop profitable crops like sugarcane, palm oil, rice, sunflower, or to be used for intensive animal farming.

2. The carbon market is also relevant as extensive plantations of exotic trees like pine or eucalyptus are established in exchange for carbon credits for large foreign firms (under the Kyoto Protocol developed countries can offset their carbon emissions by buying carbon credits from projects in the developing world through the so-called Clean Development Mechanism (CDM)).

3. Land speculation is more linked to local investors who – thanks to their proximity to local politicians and advanced knowledge of a project's status – buy land at a cheap price from small-scale farmers and then sell it for a very high price.

All areas affected by land grabbing around Uganda are known for their rich tropical biodiversity, important cultural legacy, and as food baskets, not only for themselves but for their neighbouring communities. Land grabbers are characteristically known to erode these values and violate community land rights, denying access to grazing lands, water, forests and other natural resources. The excessive use of fertilizers and pesticides in sugarcane and palm oil monocultures has reportedly compromised the health of communities. Small-scale farmers are forced to move away.

The examples here refer to few of the many cases happening all over the country (sometimes reported, sometimes unreported) that are threatening Slow Food members, in particular those linked to the following projects:

Presidia projects that support quality food production at risk of extinction, protect unique regions and ecosystems, recover traditional processing methods and safeguard native breeds and local plant varieties.

10,000 Gardens in Africa a project that uses farmer ownership to empower African food communities to achieve food sovereignty and security. Over 130 school and community gardens have been established in Uganda so far, managed by local women, men and children of all ages.

the **Ark of Taste**, a catalogue of traditional foods at risk of extinction.

LANDGRABBING IN UGANDA: WHERE

1-THE AGRIBUSINESS OF PALM OIL

WHERE

Bugala Island in Kalangala District and Buvuma Island in Buvuma District, Central Uganda

WHAT

The Vegetable Oil Development project was introduced by the Government, is supported by international funding and partners with the private sector.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE

The Vegetable Oil Development project partners, together with Asian investors.

DESCRIPTION

Native forests on the island have been cleared to provide 10,000 hectares of land for oil palm plantations (6,500 hectares for the Ugandan company and 3,500 hectares for out growers). The island hosts a population of 20,000 inhabitants who are being evicted from their homes in the forest to make way for oil palm expansion. Few rural residents hold official land titles for the land they live on. As a result, they often cannot seek compensation for their loss of land. Biodiversity loss, food insecurity, cultural conflicts as well as cultural losses are among the many consequences. One exemple concerns the red palm weevil larvae called massinya. With the introduction of monoculture plantations, the wild palm trees that used to house the insects have been cleared.
The insects now find refuge in the planted oil palm fields while researchers with private oil companies are working hard to find an effective insecticide to eliminate these stem borers. Their population has seen rapid decline as evidenced by the testimony of local harvesters. The communities of fishermen, smallholder farmers and those who depended on tourism before the oil palm plantations were introduced are also experiencing substantial loss. Fishing communities are having difficulty finding raw materials for boat building after losing access to forests and because of the pollution caused by agrichemicals. In addition, the depletion of fish stocks is leaving communities around the shores of the lake with a considerable decrease in their quality of life.

FOOD COMMUNITY AFFECTED

The fishing community whose delicacy is the red palm weevil larvae called masiinya.

2-THE AGRIBUSINESS OF SUGARCANE

WHERE

Mabira Forest, Mukono District, Kayunga District and Buikwe District, Central Uganda

WHAT

Government authorities have been trying since 2007 to dedicate over 7,100 hectares to one company for sugar production.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE

Ugandan giant sugar companies.

DESCRIPTION

New Vision, Ugandan daily news, had already reported on January 1, 2012 that "so far about 20 out of 29,000 hectares of Mabira is under intense illegal tree cutting." There has been resistance by the general public, civil society organizations and members of Parliament, but the government is not protecting this natural reserve and still insists on handing over the land to investors. Therefore, people are influenced by this negative example to cut down trees and clear the land. Local communities risk denial of access to forests, biodiversity loss as a result of deforestation, and food insecurity.

FOOD COMMUNITY AFFECTED

Kayunga Kayinja Plantain producers and Ntanzi coffee growers and gardeners.

3-LAND SPECULATION

WHERE

Nkakwa-Masuga village, Ssi Sub-county, Buikwe District, Central Uganda

WHAT

Land speculation threatens residents with forced evictions from the land. Private investors are brought on a monthly basis to tour the land and residents are cautioned against engaging in permanent activities such as constructing houses or planting food crops.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE

Four Ugandan private owners who claim to have bought the land and who do not recognize farmer residents as tenants, even if they were in agreement with landlords regarding permanent lifetime concession with an annual renting fee.

DESCRIPTION

The land covers an area called Nkakwa and has over 280 residents that are being evicted from their farming plots by various stakeholders. The farmers were born in this village and their great-grandparents are buried on this land. They do not have alternative places to move, therefore the forced evictions expose them to the risk of death by hunger or to intensive fighting for access to resources. The residents know that this land is "crown land" belonging to the Buganda kingdom and do not recognize rights to the land by land grabbers. Some of the residents took the case to the courts of law as a first step but after excessive delay in the courts, no feedback and with the heavy burden of legal expenses, they resorted to going back and settling on their land and resisting.'
'We would rather die here than become refugees in our own country," stated Joseph Kkonde, one of the farmers.

FOOD COMMUNITY AFFECTED

Bukunja Growers of Bogoya Banana, Vanilla, Cocoa and Coffee (BoCoVaCo).

4-RESISTANCE TO LAND GRABBING

WHERE

Agu swamp shared by Serere District and Ngora District, Eastern Uganda

WHAT

Communities in the area have been dealing with land grabbers since 1968. Land ownership is generally customary (from father to son) or communal, with few or no documents to prove ownership. The authorities try to evict people because they know it will not be easy for communities to protect themselves in courts of law.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE

Ugandan giant sugar companies.

DESCRIPTION

The land stretching from Gweri to Soroti district is about 40,000 hectares and is home to over 3,000 families whose livelihoods come from farming, fishing on Lake Kyoga, cattle rearing and pastoralism activities. They have had to deal with land grabbers since 1968 when the Madifani Group of companies took the land to grow onions and sunflowers, and then left due to political instability during Obote's regime. In 1973 when President Amin brought soldiers to govern the region, a lawyer from Ngora District tried to claim this land to use it to raise exotic breeds of cattle. In 1996 another group led by Mr. Opio through the Sub-county chief claimed to have brought a foreign investor to grow maize on the same land; they were resisted by the community as this land is the only source of pasture for the animals. In 2007 a big meeting chaired by Hon. Christopher Kyoga was held in Abukete village involving all members of Parliament from the region to convince communities to give away the land. Thanks to the solidarity of the community this attempt also failed. Between 2009 and 2010 the community stopped land grabbers interested in growing cotton, and between 2011 and 2012 it was one of the Sugar Giant of Uganda coming to grow sugarcane, thus interest remains. Communities in the area are worried because increased poverty in the region has resulted in extremely discouraged local youth, the very ones who should protect this swamp to ensure its sustainable use for future generations.

FOOD COMMUNITY AFFECTED

Teso Kyere Finger Millet Varieties producers and school gardens.

LET'S EXPOSE LAND GRABBING!

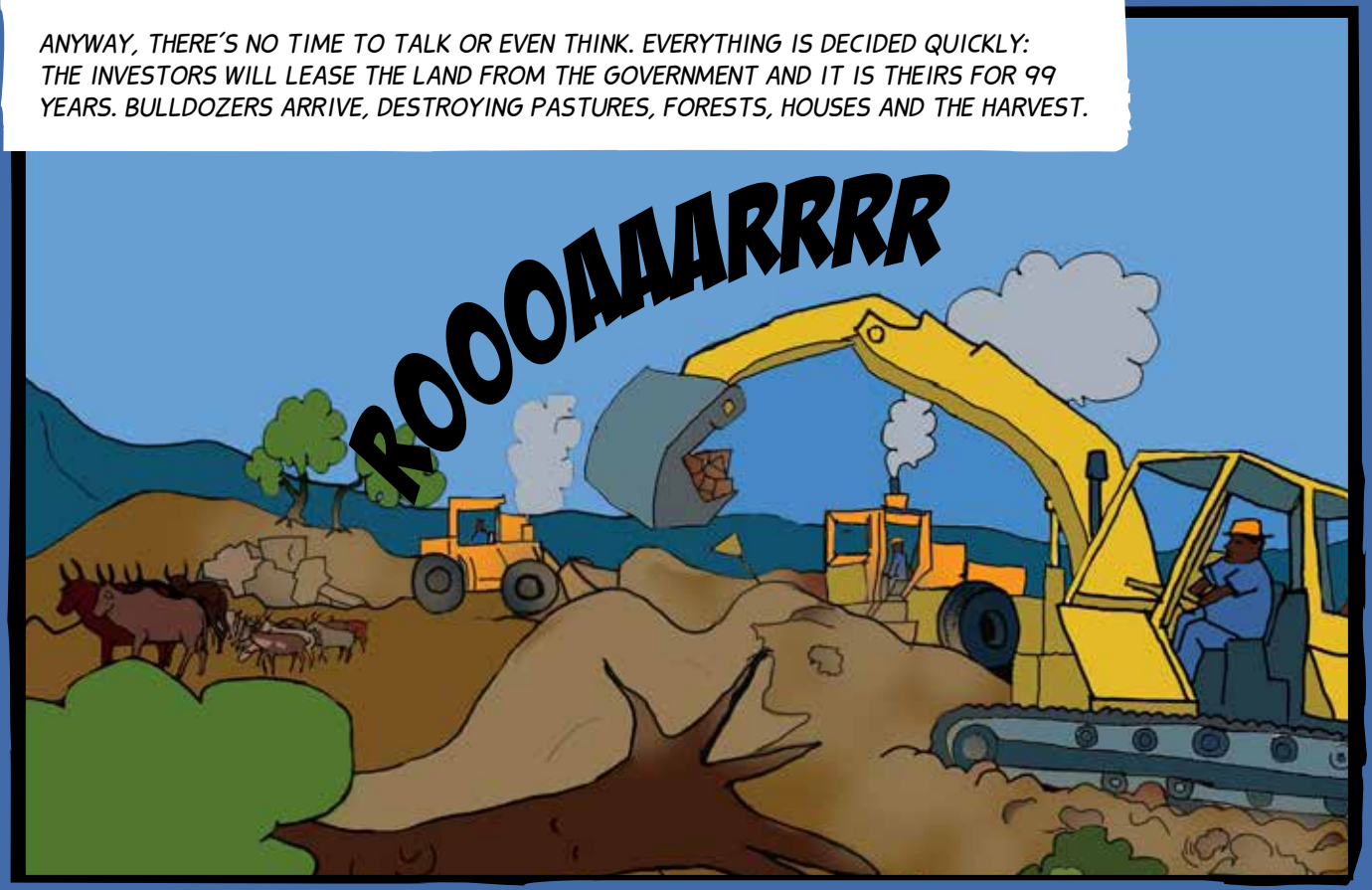
IT´S A DAY LIKE ANY OTHER IN MUTONGA. WE ARE IN UGANDA, BUT WHAT´S ABOUT TO HAPPEN COULD TAKE PLACE ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD. A PLANE CROSSES THE BLUE SKY LOOKING FOR A RUNWAY TO SAFELY LAND ON.
THREE AUTHORITARIAN-LOOKING MEN GET OUT.
A CAR WAITS TO TAKE THEM TO MUTONGA.

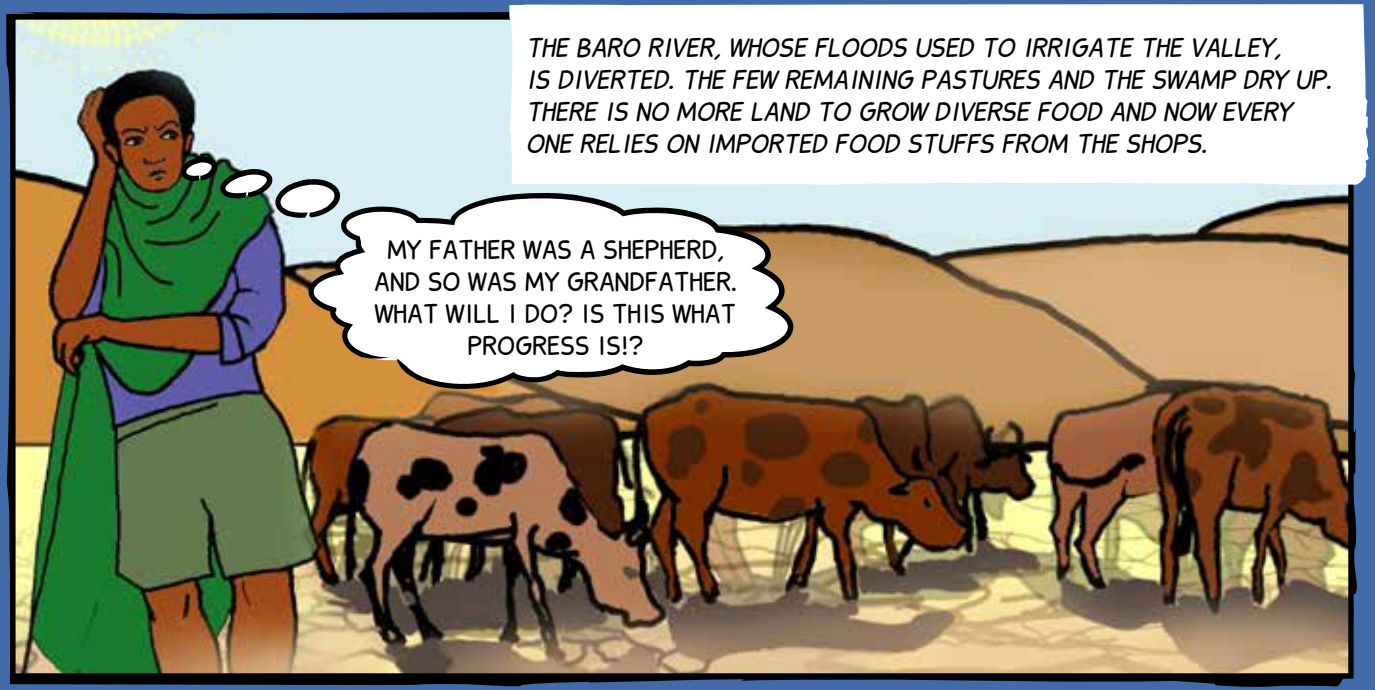
WORD SPREADS QUICKLY, THE WHOLE VILLAGE RUSHES TO THEM.

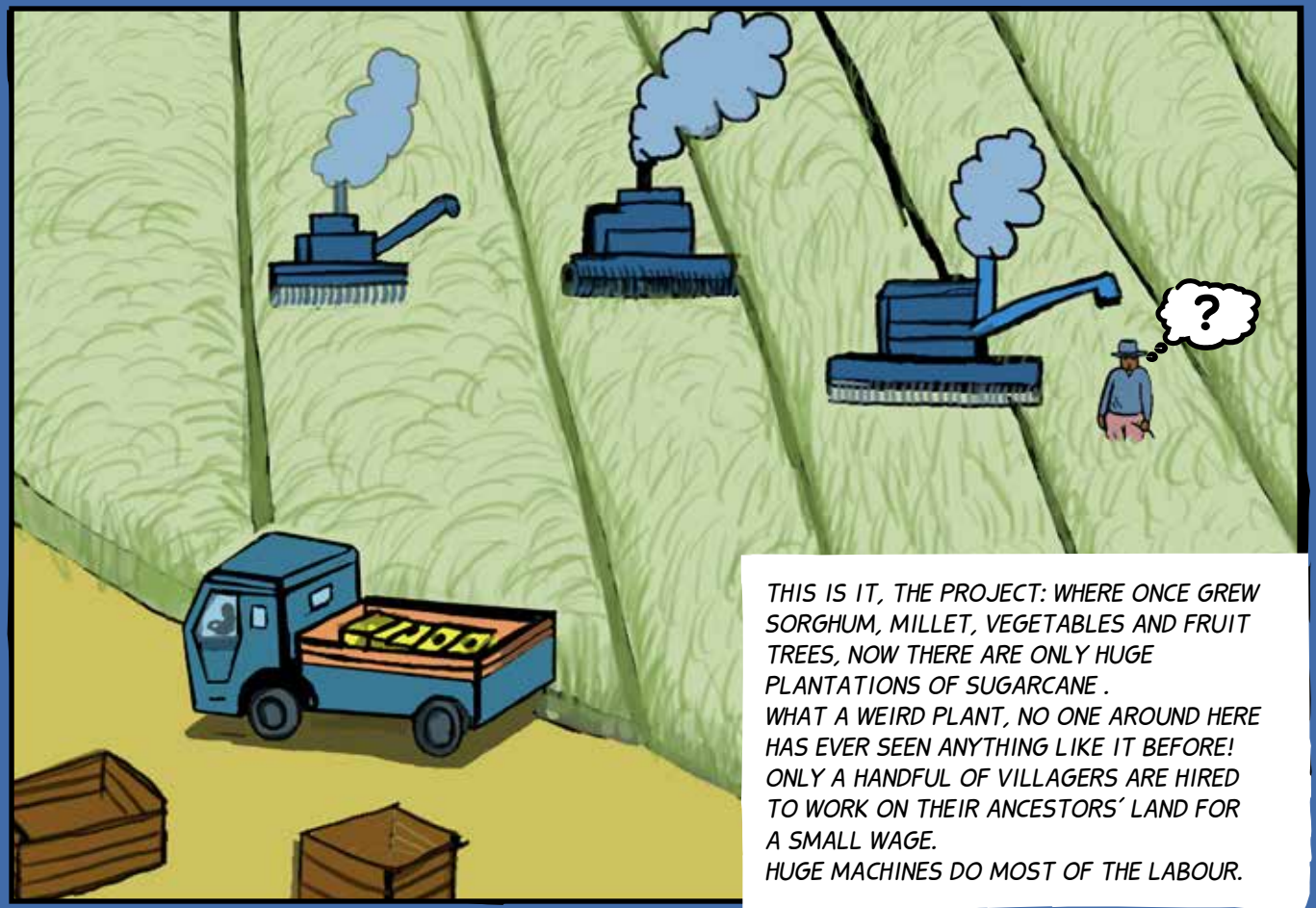
THE THREE MEN START TALKING. THEY HAVE COME WITH A SPECIFIC PURPOSE: AS INVESTORS TO INTRODUCE THE NOPE CO. PROJECT THAT PEOPLE HAVE HEARD OF LATELY.

THEY TALK ABOUT IMPORTANT SUBJECTS. AFTER ALL, LIFE IS HARD HERE, THERE ARE NO SCHOOLS OR HOSPITALS, THE RAINFALL THAT THE WHOLE VILLAGE RELIES ON IS BECOMING MORE SCARCE EVERY YEAR.
AH, WHAT RELIEF! THINGS WILL GET BETTER AND WON'T END UP LIKE THE NEARBY VILLAGE OF CHANCHO, WHERE NO ONE WAS EVEN CONSULTED! YOU KNOW THIS IS A VERY IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENT PROJECT.

ANYWAY, THERE'S NO TIME TO TALK OR EVEN THINK. EVERYTHING IS DECIDED QUICKLY: THE INVESTORS WILL LEASE THE LAND FROM THE GOVERNMENT AND IT IS THEIRS FOR 99 YEARS. BULLDOZERS ARRIVE, DESTROYING PASTURES, FORESTS, HOUSES AND THE HARVEST.

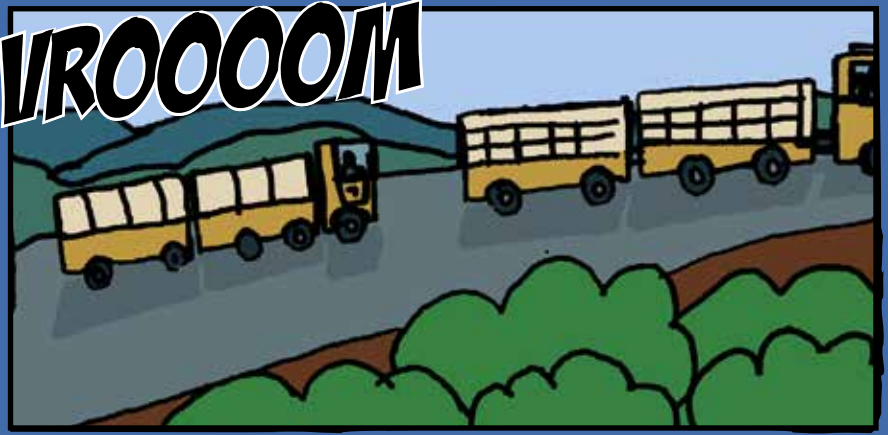



THE BARO RIVER, WHOSE FLOODS USED TO IRRIGATE THE VALLEY, IS DIVERTED. THE FEW REMAINING PASTURES AND THE SWAMP DRY UP. THERE IS NO MORE LAND TO GROW DIVERSE FOOD AND NOW EVERY ONE RELIES ON IMPORTED FOOD STUFFS FROM THE SHOPS.
MY FATHER WAS A SHEPHERD, AND SO WAS MY GRANDFATHER. WHAT WILL I DO? IS THIS WHAT PROGRESS IS!?


?
THIS IS IT, THE PROJECT: WHERE ONCE GREW SORGHUM, MILLET, VEGETABLES AND FRUIT TREES, NOW THERE ARE ONLY HUGE PLANTATIONS OF SUGARCANE .
WHAT A WEIRD PLANT, NO ONE AROUND HERE HAS EVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE IT BEFORE!
ONLY A HANDFUL OF VILLAGERS ARE HIRED TO WORK ON THEIR ANCESTORS´ LAND FOR A SMALL WAGE.
HUGE MACHINES DO MOST OF THE LABOUR.

ALL OF THE SUGARCANE'S HARVEST IS SHIPPED ABROAD. THIS WEIRD PLANT IS NOT EDIBLE, BUT IS USED TO GENERATE ENERGY!

MANY SPEEDING NOISY TRUCKS PASS BY ALL DAY ON THE NEWLY BUILT MARAM ROAD (DUSTY) ON THEIR WAY TO THE HARBOR.



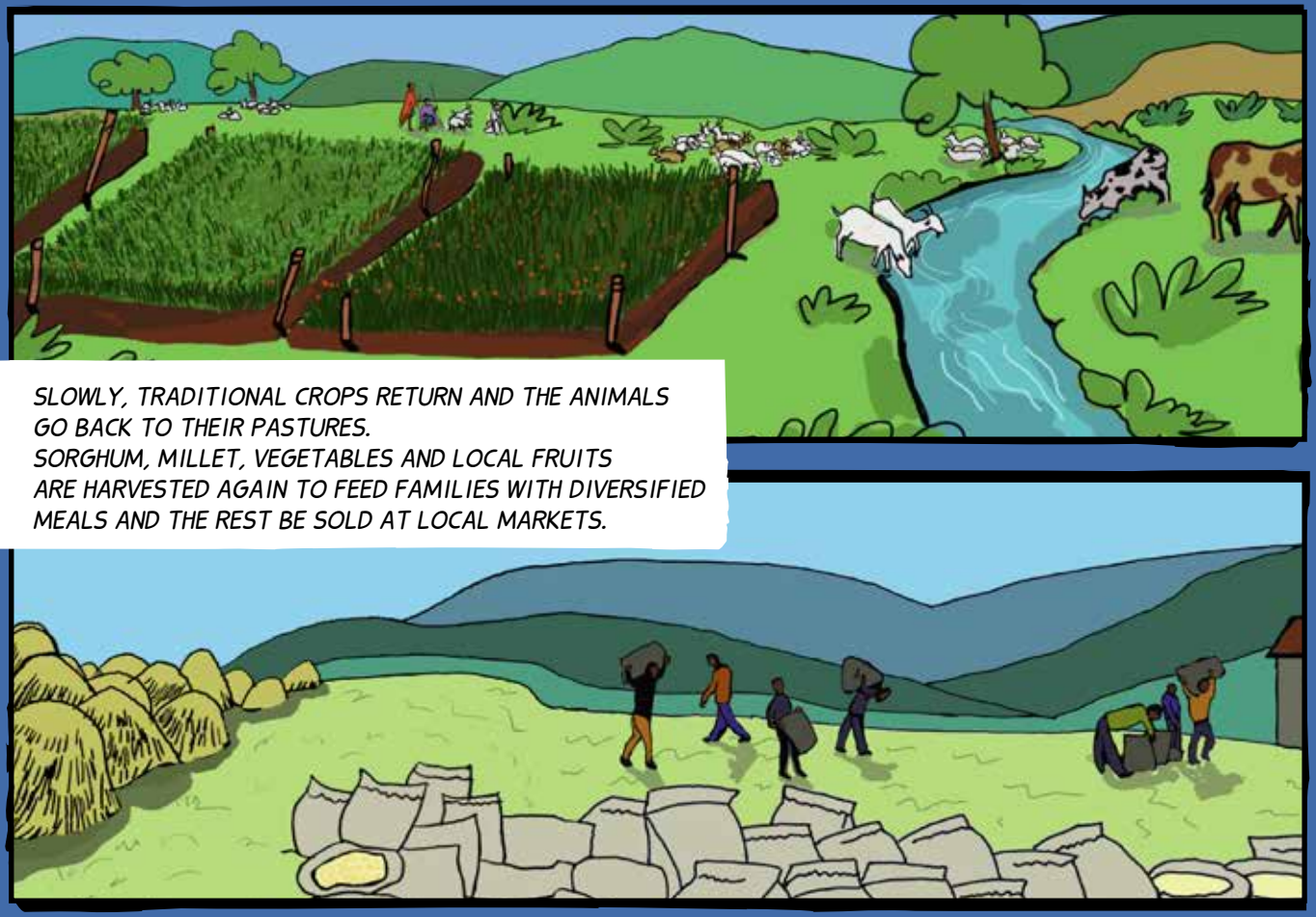
THOSE NOT HIRED BY THE PROJECT ARE FORCED TO LEAVE THEIR LAND AND MIGRATE. THE EARTH HAS BECOME ARID AND POISONED BY CHEMICAL FERTILIZERS AND PESTICIDES.

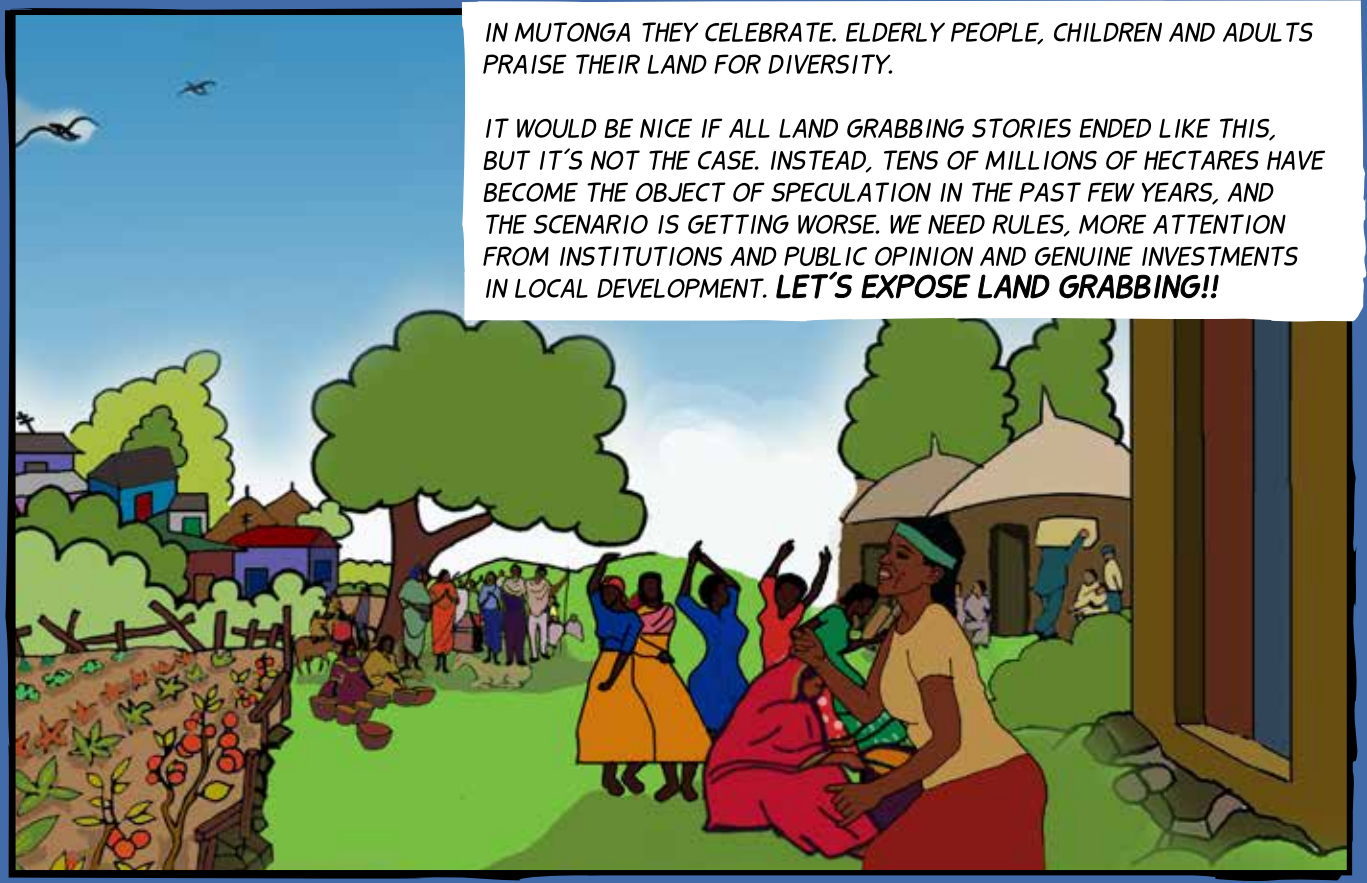
THOSE FORCED TO LEAVE THE LAND TRY TO FIND PETTY JOBS IN THE NEARBY CITY AND A PLACE TO LIVE IN THE CITY OUTSKIRTS.

HOWEVER THERE IS ANOTHER POSSIBILITY. IT'S DIFFICULT, BUT SOMETIMES THE COMMUNITY MEMBERS MANAGE TO ASSERT THEIR RIGHTS AND CONTACT THE MEDIA AND LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS AND NGOS.

LET'S EXPOSE THE PROJECT!!
WE WANT OUR LAND BACK!

IT'S RARE, BUT THIS TIME INVESTORS ARE FORCED TO RETREAT.
!!!
OUR MONEY!!
DID YOU HEAR?
WE HAVE TO LEAVE!


SLOWLY, TRADITIONAL CROPS RETURN AND THE ANIMALS GO BACK TO THEIR PASTURES.
SORGHUM, MILLET, VEGETABLES AND LOCAL FRUITS ARE HARVESTED AGAIN TO FEED FAMILIES WITH DIVERSIFIED MEALS AND THE REST BE SOLD AT LOCAL MARKETS.


IN MUTONGA THEY CELEBRATE. ELDERLY PEOPLE, CHILDREN AND ADULTS PRAISE THEIR LAND FOR DIVERSITY.
IT WOULD BE NICE IF ALL LAND GRABBING STORIES ENDED LIKE THIS, BUT IT'S NOT THE CASE. INSTEAD, TENS OF MILLIONS OF HECTARES HAVE BECOME THE OBJECT OF SPECULATION IN THE PAST FEW YEARS, AND THE SCENARIO IS GETTING WORSE. WE NEED RULES, MORE ATTENTION FROM INSTITUTIONS AND PUBLIC OPINION AND GENUINE INVESTMENTS IN LOCAL DEVELOPMENT. LET'S EXPOSE LAND GRABBING!!

JOIN SLOW FOOD

Promoting local and traditional food varieties and defending Uganda's food biodiversity

By joining Slow Food you will support a sustainable system of food production and distribution, the development of food education projects around the world, the promotion of food cultures and biodiversity and the pleasure of food and a slow way of life.

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Write us at **Slow Food International Press Office**
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To receive our newsletter with the latest updates on the Terra Madre network and Slow Food activities visit www.slowfood.com

Slow Food® Uganda

Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity

SLOW FOOD

is an international association that works to defend food biodiversity, disseminate taste education and bring producers and consumers together. Insofar as it believes that the planet is influenced by the food choices each of us make, it promotes sustainable agriculture and knowledge of food and its origins.

Slow Food involves millions of people in over 160 countries. It promotes food that is **good** for the palate, **clean** for the environment and **fair** for producers and consumers, raising the profile of the former's labour and protecting the latter's wallet.

The increase of land grabbing in Uganda is galvanizing Slow Food Uganda to plan for an important campaign to fight against this phenomenon. Most Ugandans are not aware of land grabbing until it happens. It is our duty to raise awareness among the population and to inform them about what is happening. Land grabbing is a big threat to peoples' rights as well as the food sovereignty of the country.

LET'S EXPOSE LAND GRABBING!

OUR FUTURE IS IN DANGER. STOP LAND GRABBING